

MCFRS IN-SERVICE TRAINING MINUTES



COMMON MISTAKES OF THE NEW FIRE OFFICER

As new, old, or aspiring fire officers, we all have a great deal to learn about managing people. Some of us hone our skills as firefighters but never really learn the art of communicating with people. As fire officers, we have a vision of what we would like to see executed but how is that message conveyed to our subordinates? We have the infinite power of the “gold badge” but how do we use it? How does all this translate into fulfilling the department’s vision?

Roger Fulton is a retired Captain with the New York State Police who holds a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice Management in addition to being a graduate of the coveted FBI National Academy. In addition to his instructional on-line courses on basic leadership, Captain Fulton has written several books on leadership and management in the public and private sectors. In one of his books, “Common Sense Supervision,” he outlines 25 of the most common mistakes often made by new supervisors. An excerpt from his book recently appeared in Firehouse.com in

an article written by David Murphy, Assistant Chief of the Richmond, Kentucky Fire Department (regular Firehouse.com contributor). This month's In Service Training Minutes will highlight ten of those twenty-five common mistakes.

1. Failed to take charge. The ability to assume a leadership position is literally implied when you assume the role of a fire officer. A fire officer does not have the luxury of not taking charge when it is uncomfortable or not convenient.
2. Had an inconsistent approach to problems. A company officer that brings his problems to work walks around half cocked; you never know what the outcome will be when a crisis appears.
3. Makes changes for the sake of change. There is the supervisor who likes to "shake things up" without doing the necessary homework to gauge whether or not the changes are warranted. Before change is implemented, it needs to be thought out and planned.
4. Immediately makes drastic changes in discipline or procedure. "There's a new Sheriff in town and it's my way or the highway!" Although a change may be warranted, the new officer must be patient making sound evaluations not based on hearsay.
5. Failed to motivate subordinates. There are two types of leaders in the workplace: positive and negative. A good fire officer will stand behind departmental values and never bad mouth or trash talk the department.
6. Failed to deal with problems immediately. The best approach to dealing with a problem is sooner than later. Handle issues as soon as they occur.
7. Tried to be "one of the guys." Once promoted to the rank of an officer, an individual is entrusted with a managerial role that may soon be tested by one's close comrades. Be a Boss on the job, be a Buddy off the job.
8. Lacked knowledge of labor laws, contracts and SOP's. All fire officers must have a working knowledge of departmental policies and procedures. Ignorance of administrative law is no excuse. Lack of knowledge in this area can jeopardize not only the fire officer but also the department litigiously.

9. Showed favoritism to subordinates. Favoritism is not the mark of a good officer.
10. Gave no positive reinforcement. No officer can do the job alone. Effective officers praise their subordinates when they do a good job or go beyond the scope of normal expectations.

After reviewing these common mistakes, you may find that you have experienced some if not all listed. For those of us who are not fire officers, certainly we have encountered supervisors in our career that we all praised as being “strong fire ground officers” but lacked interpersonal skills in dealing with their personnel; and then there those that are the opposite. There are those of us who could not make a decision in the station if our lives depended upon it yet on the fire ground, decisiveness is our strong suit. As long as we identify where our deficiencies lie, are open and honest about them, and strive toward improvement, there is always room for significant growth.

Source: Fulton, Roger V. *Common Sense Supervision*. 1998

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